

XXX 11.

CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

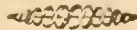
HOPEWELL CHURCH, N. C.,

JULY 18th, 1852,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. H. B. CUNNINGHAM.

"I also will show mine opinion."—*Job*.



CHARLOTTE:

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Notice.

The following Sermon was preached in accordance with a written request from the HOPEWELL DIVISION of the Sons of Temperance. After its delivery, they requested a copy for publication, but as I had neither the leisure nor the disposition to prepare it for the press at that time, I did not consent to furnish them a copy.

Circumstances of a local and personal nature, which have since come to my knowledge, have induced me to prepare it for publication. It was originally delivered from a brief skeleton, but in writing it out I have endeavored to give the *ipsissima verba* which I used; and I feel satisfied that no important sentiment has been omitted or changed.

I have no wish to come before the public on this or any other subject, but justice to myself and the cause of truth and morals, seemed to require it.

H. B. C.

Sermon.

2ND. PETER¹, 6 :

“ And to knowledge temperance.”

The general scope and design of the Apostle, in this interesting and important passage, seems to have been, to illustrate and enforce what men are to do in return for God's rich mercy in calling them to salvation; and granting them the influence of his Spirit and the co-operation of his grace to enable them both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

He tells them that they are faithfully and conscientiously to discharge all the duties of *faith* and *practice*;—and those of the latter class are digested in regular order, and with a most beautiful gradation; in which the principal christian virtues are represented by a beautiful *chain*, of which the various parts are linked together.—*Faith* being as it were the main and primary principle, from which the various successive links of virtue are suspended; and *charity*, or universal benevolence, being that complete link around which all the others clustre and in which they all terminate.

The prominent virtues, too, of each class to which he alludes, are *specified* by way of *example*;—nor are we to fancy here as some suppose, a kind of *system* of christian virtues: nor should we refine too much, or place too much stress upon the precise *order* in which they are arranged between *Faith* and *Love*. For we may admit, that perhaps after all, the idea prominent in the Apostle's mind was not that of a chain suspended from a point, but that of an *edifice* consisting of three courses, drawing his illustrations from which, the Apostle intends to instruct them in the true nature of that christian edifice, or spiritual building, which they were requested to raise on the foundation of their Faith. This view of the present passage is strongly confirmed by the Apostle Jude,—“But beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life;” for the language of Peter was evidently in the mind of Jude when he wrote his epistle. But though we are not to imagine that we have here presented a strictly formal system of Christian virtues; yet those which are specified appear to be placed in regular *order*, and with a deliberate and skilful disposition, like the successive stories of an edifice.

Of this building the Apostle has marked out the foundation, fixed the basis, proportioned the members, adorned the superstructure, and crowned the whole with the richest materials. And all this with such justice of science and sublimity of thought, that every preceding virtue gives stability to the following; and every succeeding one imparts perfection to that which went before;—where the three orders of this heavenly architecture, the *Human, Divine, and Social* virtues, are so masterly disposed, that the *human* and *social* have their *strengths* and *graces* heightened and supported by their common connection with the *divine*.

The Apostle Peter here, like a wise *master-builder*, chooses for his foundation that *Rock*, on which our Lord had promised him that he would build the church;—directed by the same Divine Spirit with Paul, who says, other foundation can, or ought, no man to lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” And then upon this foundation, in regard to which he had the assurance of Christ, that whatever should be reared thereon, in accordance with his will, ‘the gates of Hell should not prevail against it,’—he proceeds to erect the beautiful temple of moral and christian virtues, by the profession and the practice of which, Man’s salvation and God’s glory are promoted.

In the context, he tells them that they had been called to glory and virtue, and had given unto them great and precious promises, through belief of which, they might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world, through the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord;—he then enjoins upon them that giving all diligence, they would “add to faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience Godliness; and to Godliness brotherly kindness;—and to brotherly kindness charity.” And he assures them that the possession and practice of these virtues, will enable them to glorify God here and fit them to enjoy him forever. For if these things be in them and abound, they will be fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ;—and if they do these things, they shall never fall, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Such then, is the substance of the passage, in which our text is found. And from the whole tenor of the passage, it is evident, that when the apostle enjoins *temperance* he uses the term in no constricted sense, as implying merely abstinence from any one practice or sin; but intends it to be taken in its widest sense, as one of the cardinal christian virtues, and intends it to embrace all that is included in that term.

And it is of *temperance* in this sense, that we now intend to speak. The day and the place are both too sacred to be perverted to any other purpose.

In the further discussion at this time, we shall endeavor :

- I. To define Temperance, or show in what it consists.
- II. Show why we should cultivate and practice this virtue.
- III. Show how this temperance is to be secured and promoted.

I. Define Temperance.

Temperance as we understand it, is that virtue which a person is said to possess, who moderates and restrains his sensual appetites. But the term is often used in a more general sense, as being synonymous with moderation; and it is then applied indiscriminately to all the feelings, passions, and acts. And used in this sense, it implies the keeping a due medium between extremes, or that calmness and equanimity, which should at all times be exhibited, in all our pursuits, pleasures, and passions.

A reference to the original language of the scriptures will show that the word rendered *temperance* in the text, and wherever else it occurs, was designed to convey the sense, we have ascribed to it.

Intemperance, therefore, as a vice, must be just the reverse of this; and it may be defined to be, a want of moderation, or of due restraint, or excess in any kind of action, or indulgence.

It is not sufficient then, to say with some modern apostles, that intemperance is the habitual indulgence in drinking spiritous liquors, with or without drunkenness. We contend that excess in any thing is intemperance in the Gospel sense of the term.

We include excessive indulgence, either in eating or drinking,—the abuse either of the powers of the body, or of the faculties of the mind;—and the licentious or inordinate indulgence of the animal passions, all under the same category of intemperance, as impliedly prohibited in the language of the text.

In a word, whatever indulgence undermines the health, impairs the senses, inflames the passions, clouds and sullies the reason, perverts the judgment, enslaves the will, or in any way disorders or debilitates the powers of the body or the faculties of the mind,—is intemperance.

Or, to be more brief. We say that, whatever violates those physical and moral laws, which nature and nature's God has enstamped on our physical and intellectual constitution, or revealed in his written word—is intemperance.

What then is required by the injunction of our text? “And to knowledge temperance.” Or what is it to be a temperate man? And we would answer in the language of the Apostle, that he only is a temperate man, who is temperate in all things.

And we prove this position from reason and science, as well as from scripture.

Learned Physiologists tell us, that the principle of life is afforded to every individual in such quantity, or such manner, as to admit of living actions being carried on under the most favorable circumstances only for a limited or definite period; and as no human power or skill can increase this principle, one jot or tittle, so neither can the actions of life be urged, beyond the standard of sound health without necessarily shortening it. And this shortening of life, will be for minutes, or months, or years, according to the degree and continuance of the excitement beyond the natural and uniform rate of healthy actions. The same idea is expressed by the christian Poet, when he says.

“Each beating Pulse we tell,
Leaves but the number less.”

Excess, then, either in eating or drinking, in exercise, either physical or mental, neglecting to preserve the proper control of the feelings and emotions, passions and propensities—by the excitement they produce, exhaust the principle of vitality, and thus shorten life:—and therefore, come under the crime of intemperance.

There are then, other ways, than by the excessive use of ardent spirits, in which men may be intemperate. And yet there are those, who would be considered temperance persons, *par excellence*, because they practice abstinence from this one thing,—while, like Dives, they fare sumptuously, and excessively every day,—give a loose rein to their corrupt passions, and are in the daily habit of *chewing, smoking, or eating the nauseous tobacco*; both injuring their health and desecrating the very sanctuary of God with their filthy saliva. That in the expression of this sentiment we do not give merely our own assertion. We would say that by a reference to high authorities on the subject, we find that Ardent Spirits when treated of by Medical writers, and arranged according to its effects on the human body, is placed in the same class, and considered under the same relations, with henbane, deadly night shade, *tobacco*, hemlock, opium and various other Poisons. *Tobacco*, then, is just as injurious to the system as ardent spirits, and yet those who use it habitually, if not as a beverage, as a dietetic, as a luxury, or whatever they chose to call it, are the persons who claim to be the very paragons of temperance!

In opposition to all such vices we repeat it then, that we consider the temperance enjoined by the text, to be not mere abstinence from one or a few things; but a christian virtue, and as such, a moral duty, binding upon all, and extending to every act and every feeling of the individual. It requires moderation in every thing, using this world as not abusing it; the cultivating and practising of "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."

II. Show why we should cultivate and practice this virtue?

In the text, as we have seen, temperance is classed among the moral and christian virtues; and therefore, like all the rest, its culture and practice must be obligatory upon all men.

But to be more specific, we remark, that we are bound to cultivate and practice it—

1st. Because God has expressly commanded us to do so. In the text we are enjoined to add "to knowledge temperance," Again, "let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand." "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you, unawares." "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is set before thee; and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties, for they are deceitful meats."—"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying." "Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor *drunkards*, shall inherit the kingdom of God." "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess,—for they that be drunken, are drunken in the night; but let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love." We might multiply quotations, but these are amply sufficient to prove that by the command of God, intemperance of every kind and form is expressly prohibited; and the opposite virtue, as distinctly enjoined.

2nd. Temperance is conducive to health.

Health is absolutely necessary to every man, in order that he may perform his appropriate duties to his God, his fellowmen and himself. But without the exercise of temperance health cannot possibly be preserved. Intemperance saps its very foundation. Pain, sorrow, and disease are its invariable effects.

Habitual intemperance of any kind, destroys the constitution, and renders it in a very peculiar degree liable to the ravages of disease; while at the same time it disqualifies it from deriving any essential benefit from the usual means of cure, alleviation, or hope.

The practice of temperance is equally advantageous to the mind, as to the body. Whatever injures the physical powers, necessarily debilitates the mental faculties. And thus the habit of intemperance acting upon the intellectual powers, through the medium of the body, tends inevitably to weaken and debase those lofty faculties of the mind.

3rd. We should cultivate temperance, as a defence, against the evils of injustice, lust, intemperance, and poverty. To all which, the man especially, who is in the habit of yielding himself up to the influence of the intoxicating bowl, is peculiarly exposed.

4th. By the example of Jesus Christ.

He alone of all that have ever walked the earth in human form, exhibited the example of a perfect man. And he was emphatically a temperate man; temperate in all things. Though, like many of his followers, accused by his enemies as being a "glutton and a wine-bibber." Yet his bitterest enemies cannot point to the solitary occasion, when either in the indulgence of his appetites or passions, he was guilty of even the shadow of intemperance. To walk in his footsteps, to follow his example, to imitate him in all his imitable perfections, is the duty of every man. And his example enjoins temperance, in language stronger than words.

Such are some of the reasons, by which we would urge upon you, the duty enjoined in the text,—“Add to your knowledge temperance.”

III. How is this temperance to be secured and promoted.

1. By avoiding all those causes, and circumstances, which are naturally adapted to allure us to the commission of this sin.

No one is compelled to frequent the places in which, or the company of the persons by whom, this evil habit is encouraged. Every man can avoid regular drinking, and by the use of the proper means he can abstain from excessive indulgence in any thing. And if he can do this, then it is his duty to do so;—a duty of the most pressing kind. Every thing here, depends on *resisting*, or avoiding, the *beginning of evil*.

Peculiarly is it the duty, and wisdom of all persons, to abstain from the haunts of drunkenness, and from the society of the lewd and vicious.

2nd. The man, who finds in himself, any peculiar relish or fondness for spiritous liquors, or for any other sensual indulgence,—is solemnly bound to abstain, at once and entirely, if he wishes to avoid ruin and disgrace. He has already gained the summit of a moral precipice, and one incautious step in advance, may hurl him into the fearful moral abyss below.

3rd. All who have not only acquired the relish, but have actually begun, to form the habit of intemperate indulgence, are still more strongly bound to desist absolutely at once, if they expect to escape the fell destroyer. Their danger is peculiarly imminent. Delay or hesitation in their case, must inevitably prove fatal.—They have already passed the verge of the crumbling precipice, and nothing but a strenuous retrograde movement can arrest their fate. Like the midnight spy, who attempts to approach the enemy's lines, but is hailed by the vigilant sentinel and commanded to stop or be shot, while the click of the trigger enforces the order, and tells him that to advance is death;—so must he who has begun to form the habit of intemperance, turn and fly for his life, or all is lost. Every effort at gradual reformation, in such a case, will only, in the end cheat him who makes it. Hard as the case may appear to be, he must break off at once, or be ruined.

4th. Finally, we remark, that all of every class and character, in the community, are bound scrupulously to guard against indulgence, in any and every form of intemperance, if they would cultivate the virtue enjoined in the text.

Such is the natural proclivity of human nature, that no reputation, nor wisdom, will effectually secure any of us against this evil. This is a sin which has found its way into the cottage and the palace,—into the study of the philosopher and the sacred desk,—into the council hall and the bench of justice; and what would seem contrary to the dictates of nature, as well as delicacy, it has been found even among the female sex: and that too, even, where, distinction, amiableness, and refinement would appear to forbid even the suspicion of its existence. And if it is true that no age or class, or sex is exempt from danger, then it is the duty of all to be sober, watchful, vigilant, lest in an ungarded hour, they might fall before their wily assailant.

Such then, are some of the ways in which we are to guard against this insidious evil. And all this we ought to do, and may do. But after all these are only the secondary means, of avoiding this evil, and escaping the consequent ruin. If we foolishly trust entirely to these means, and look no higher than ourselves for aid, all our efforts will be futile. You may pledge yourselves, with all the so-

lemnity you can devise,—but if you will be content to trust simply in the power of these pledges, you will find to your sorrow, that you might as well have written your name upon the shifting sands of the ocean's shore, where the next wave would obliterate every trace of your character. You may resolve in the most solemn manner to reform, but if you depend upon your own strength to perform those resolutions, you will find your efforts as vain, as if you should attempt to arrest the rolling waters of the mighty Mississippi with banks of sand, or bind Niagara's rushing flood, with a rope of straw.

All moral and social evils, have their seat, their deep foundation in the natural depravity and desperate wickedness of the human heart. Who then, can effectually and permanently remedy these evils, but He whose legitimate province it is, to eradicate this depravity and purify this fountain of wickedness? Who can arrest and restrain these overflowings of sin, but He who turns the hearts of men, as the rivers of water, whither he pleases? It belongs to him of right to devise the plan and appoint the means, both for the reformation and the purification of men. And he has done this in the scriptures of truth.

The Gospel is the panacea for every moral and spiritual evil. It is, therefore, the great instrument of moral reform. And its perfect efficiency and adaptation for this purpose, is proved by the simple fact that it is God's plan. It is able to reach all men—to raise the lowest and reach the highest.

“ When once it enters to the mind,
It spreads such light abroad,
The meanest souls instruction find,
And raise their thoughts to God.”

Do you wish, then, to reform men? Here is the plan: “Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.” It is in vain, then, to think of reforming men, simply by the schemes of men's devising—by the influence of Associations—by the power of pledges, or by introducing into your organizations the sordid and selfish principles of modern infidel socialism and fraternity. It is worse than idle, it is vain and presumptuous to think of reforming men without religion. During a period of four thousand years the world tried the experiment, but failed. Though philosophers then lived as acute as any that have ever graced the world; sages as wise as any that have since attempted to enlighten and reform men. And do you ask the cause of their failure? the answer is easy. It was because “the law had not yet gone forth from Zion, nor the word of God from Jerusalem;” because the star of Bethlehem had not yet risen above the plains of Judea, heralding the birth of Him whose advent was hailed by angelic choirs, in rapturous strains of heavenly music.

Then was ushered in the period of which the apostle speaks, when he says, "the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent." To this system, whose germ was then enclosed in the manger at Bethlehem, are we to look for all that is able to make man moral and holy. Paul himself, with all his learning, his strength of intellect, and his powers of self-control acknowledged his entire indebtedness to this source—"By the grace of God, I am what I am."

On this Gospel, then, we place all our hopes for the moral reformation and spiritual renovation of men. Those who choose may try other schemes and trust to other systems. Believing the Gospel to be the wisdom and power of God, for every moral and spiritual purpose we look not beyond it; content with this, we no farther seek.

Do you wish, then, to reform the world, you can hope to succeed only by inducing men to embrace the principles and imbibe the spirit of the Gospel. You must endeavor to press on the conscience of every man, a sense of his entire sinfulness, his utter helplessness, and his absolute inability to perform any thing morally good, and then point him to the all-sufficiency of the strength promised him in the Gospel, and imparted to him by the spirit of Jesus Christ. Believing those promises and aided by that spirit his reform will be effected. But you need not expect to succeed in your efforts while you rally round a banner which has been often trailed in the dust, or march under leaders who have themselves been but recently drawn from the slough of intemperance and the sinks of pollution.

And who, with all the effrontery of self-complacency, and infidel impertinence, fling their idle sneers at the Church of the living God, of which he has said that "she is the light of the world, and salt of the earth,"—the very pillar and ground of the truth; and say that the Church of Jesus Christ has proved a failure; and that as at present constituted she has not arrested, and she cannot arrest the floodtides of intemperance and vice, which threaten to overspread the world! Who tell you that you must first reform men, and then convert them; thus presuming to limit the power of God, and dictate to his spirit. Such was not the opinion of Paul, and his inspired co-laborers;—they went forth every where—whether at Rome or Corinth, preaching the Gospel, and seeking by that to convert men, and thus reform them effectually. They knew, for they were taught by the spirit of truth, that any reformation to be permanent must be thorough—that the root must be made good before the fruit can possess that quality. Hence, wherever they went, among the most barbarous tribes, or the most refined communities, they preached the Gospel, and trusted to that to reform and save men. And such must be the course pursued now by the advocates of moral reform.

Do you want, then, to guard your friends and your families from the debasing vice of intemperance in any of its forms! Strive to bring them under the influence of the Gospel; train them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Teach them that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and urge them to cherish an abiding sense of the fact at all times "that thou God seest me." And thus you will throw around them a protecting shield, more potent and safe than the most solemn pledges of mere human devising.

To the young among you, I would say, do you ask how you are to be kept from the evil that is in the world beset as you are in the morning of life, with temptations on every hand and allurements to vice crowded thick round your pathway? While conscious of your own weakness, you often exclaim:

"How shall the young secure their hearts,
And guard their lives from sin."

The reply is simple,—

"Thy word the choicest rules imparts
To keep the conscience clean."

"Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer."

Yes, your only safety in the hour of temptation, in the moment of danger, is to cherish a feeling of God's presence and of your accountability to him, and the odiousness of sin. And, then, if assailed by temptation, you can, like Joseph, indignantly repel it, by saying,— "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God." Influenced by these sentiments, actuated by these feelings, you may expect that your steps will be kept from slipping, and your feet from falling. The God in whom you trust will be your guide even unto death, and afterwards receive you to glory. Neglecting this, and looking to any other source for security, you will most assuredly stumble upon the dark mountains of iniquity, and fall to rise no more.

We repeat, then, that in every effort for the moral reformation of men, we shall feel it to be our privilege and duty to rally around a banner which has never been trailed in the dust, and follow in the footsteps of a leader who, as the breaker up of the way, has gone before, and by his own inherent strength and purity, has vanquished every enemy and triumphed over every temptation, and thus as the Captain of our Salvation, insures a final and complete victory to all his followers. We have his promise that he will be with his Church and people always, even unto the end of the world; and that "He will be merciful and bless us, so that his way shall be known upon earth, his saving health among all nations." "His

word is like a fire, and a hammer, to break in pieces the heart of stone, and subdue it to the love and practice of virtue."

Yes, the Gospel in its very essence, is purity and love, and wherever it exerts its heavenly power on the heart, it enkindles a kindred flame, and inspires a love for all that is pure and holy. Like the river of the water of life clear as crystal seen in the Apocalyptic vision issuing from the throne of God and the Lamb, on whose banks grew those trees of varied fruit and whose leaves were for the healing of the nations—so the Gospel, wherever it comes, not only furnishes in itself, the means of spiritual renovation, but at the same time causes to spring up around it, all that is beautiful and excellent in social life, elevates, refines, and nourishes all the moral sensibilities of men. And thus it restrains from vice, while it renews the heart. And when that Gospel shall not only have touched and glanced on every land, but shall have taken up its permanent abode, among every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and visited with its renovating spirit and purifying grace, every human heart, then shall the moral reformation of the world, be as complete, as in the purposes of God it was intended to be. And for the coming of that time, every Christian should labor and pray.

In the name of our God, then, will we set up "our banner," and on that banner we will inscribe, not the boasted mottoes, nor the mock Trinities of men's devising, such as Faith, Hope, and Charity, nor Fidelity, Purity, Love; or Friendship, Truth, and Love; but on it will written, in letters of living light, the heaven-descended motto, first uttered by angelic tongues, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men," and under the waving folds of that banner, we shall confidently march to victory and triumph. What it has already done for our world, affords a sure earnest of what it will yet accomplish.

The refined and luxurious Polytheism of Greece, and the widespread and pompous religion of Pagan Rome, were swept away at its approach, like the shades of night by the rising sun. Until that religion, once spoken of as deriving its origin from a despised Nazarene, and embraced by the offscourings of the world, rose from its obscurity, arrayed itself in the Imperial purple, sat down upon the throne of the Cæsars, and swayed the sceptre of the world. And this it did, because it carried with it a power which is invincible—the power of the cross. And that power is ever the same, under all circumstances. It can reform and purify the most barbarous tribes—it abolished the dark and bloody system of the Druids. In India it can break kown the strong barrier of Caste. In Africa it can raise the debased Bushman to the dignity of man. In the Isles of the

sea it can change the Cannibal into a being mild and gentle as a lamb. In the land of light, and science, and civilization, where man lifts his proud front against the Almighty, it can humble the blasphemer, prostrate the infidel, reform the DRUNKARD, and fill every heart with gratitude, peace and love. Going in the strength of this Gospel, and sustained by our glorious leader, there is nothing too great or difficult for us to accomplish. And when this Gospel shall be universally diffused and embraced, then shall be ushered in that long expected, auspicious day, the glories of which have been so often predicted by inspired Prophets, and sung by Poets, when "the Earth and the fullness thereof shall be the Lord's." When Man, reformed from sin and vice of every kind, shall have "Holiness to the Lord," written upon his forehead, his heart, and on every work of his hands. And, then, shall this earth become what it was originally designed to be—one vast and beautiful temple, filled with the honor, redolent with the glory, and vocal with the high praises of Jehovah, the Creator, and Redeemer—AMEN.

NOTE BY THE PUBLISHERS.

Some apology may seem to be necessary for our delay in publishing this Sermon

When the manuscript was handed to us, which was on the 10th of September, 1852, we were engaged on another job; which occupied us for several weeks, and when that was completed, our hands all left us; and since then it has been exceedingly difficult for us to be able to get our paper out regularly.

This accounts for the late appearance of this Sermon.

ERRATA.

On the 2d page in part of the first impression "*impressima verba*" ought to be "*ipsissima verba*."

